

Roland Bartl

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To: Roland Bartl
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Hi, I thought this was a good article on Concord - I found this interesting in light of the fact we're discussing the Acton Master Plan - in case you wanted to distribute it - thanks!



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The Boston Globe

Questions cloud road to town's 2020 vision



Monitoring of progress at issue

By Sally Heaney, Globe Correspondent | July 3, 2005

A debate has developed over who should monitor the realization of Concord's new Comprehensive Long Range Plan -- a published vision of the town in the year 2020 as a vibrant community with its natural beauty, history, village centers, and agriculture preserved and a wide range of housing options available.

The Comprehensive Long Range Plan Committee, which created the plan and will soon be dissolved, has recommended that a new committee be created to help with the daunting task of addressing 349 items on a to-do list aimed at achieving the plan's vision.

Timothy Blancke, chairman of the Comprehensive Long Range Plan Committee, said that trying to implement the items would be like "drinking from a fire hydrant" unless a new facilitation committee is formed to manage the process.

But not everyone agrees that a new committee is necessary or even a good idea.

Some citizens fear that a new committee would usurp power that rightly belongs to other groups, such as the Board of Selectmen or Planning Board. And some town staff members don't want one more committee making demands on their time and providing oversight that they don't think they need.

Whether an existing board or committee or a new one takes responsibility for making sure a plan becomes a working tool rather than a bookshelf ornament, it is important there is a designated body to do so, according to Mark Racicot, manager of government services for the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. The council is a state-established regional planning organization for 401 communities

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in Greater Boston.

"There have been occasions where plans have not been implemented to the degree they could have," he said. "It is best to assign responsibility for following up on an annual basis to make sure that the appropriate committees listed in the action items have been able to move forward."

In Lexington, a new plan was published in two parts in 2002 and 2003. Maryann McCall-Taylor, director of the Planning Department, said the to-do items were assigned to the boards and committees that had a natural interest in them and implementation is underway.

"It has been surprisingly used, compared to many comprehensive plans which look lovely on the shelf," she said. "At Town Meeting we've had it quoted back to us. It's out there. It seems like people don't all agree with everything, but it's something that should be discussed."

In Concord, Anne Shapiro, chairwoman of the Board of Selectmen, said she would like to wait until all members of her board are present to debate the merits of the proposed new committee. If more pressing items are on the agenda for July 25, the next meeting that all the selectmen can attend, discussion of a facilitation committee will have to wait until a future meeting, she said.

"This is an important decision, and I'd like to make certain we have everyone's perspective on it," she said. She and two other current selectwomen, Margaret Briggs and Virginia McIntyre, served on the Comprehensive Long Range Plan Committee during its three years of work. Shapiro declined to give her opinion about whether a facilitation committee should be created prior to the board discussion.

But McIntyre said she is dubious about the wisdom of creating a new committee.

"While we've received the report, the selectmen haven't adopted every one of the recommendations," she said. "I'm hoping that, as selectmen, we're going to be consulting the report regularly as we set our goals. It's a terrific reference. However, if we have a facilitation committee, that judgment of what matters to move forward is taken from the selectmen, and that's the selectmen's job."

Blancke said the facilitation committee would not tread on the selectmen's territory.

"People thought we were going to create a committee that would override the selectmen," he said. "There is no intent to do that, just to help coordinate things and pull in people who wouldn't otherwise be pulled in."

He said the proposed committee of five people would help ensure that more of the items the selectmen wanted to get done would be accomplished. "The king of all committees is the Board of Selectmen, and generally the selectmen would decide which things to pursue," he said. "We aren't so naïve as to think all 349 things would be done."

But, at a public hearing on the plan in February, several people in the audience "sounded like they interpreted that we were trying to take over the world," he said.

Marcia Rasmussen, Concord's director of planning and land

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management, said there has been a proliferation of new committees over the years and it is difficult for the staff to support them all. She added that some people think a new committee with its own priorities might misdirect staff away from working on the priorities of the selectmen and town manager.

She said the existing town boards and staff managed to implement everything that was worth doing in the town's previous plan, the 1987 Master Plan, without a special committee to oversee progress. "We go back to that document and check it periodically," she said.

The new plan cites many accomplishments from the previous plan, with 25 items singled out for particular note. A few of these items are: protection of major portions of Estabrook Woods; construction of a visitor center in Concord Center; installation of an underground irrigation system at Rideout and Emerson Playgrounds; establishment of a demolition delay bylaw, and creation of a nonprofit Concord Housing Trust to assist with the development of affordable housing.

But success implementing the 1987 plan doesn't mean a committee isn't needed to help with the new one, which has many more initiatives to carry out, Blancke said. The 1987 plan was "less comprehensive than the one we just did because it didn't have anything to do with governance or finance," he said.

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